

SCATTERED, BUT NOT SILENCED

1. THE PERSECUTED CHURCH TODAY

-Before we begin **tonight**, I want us to **think** about **something** that probably **DOESN'T** cross our **minds** very often.

-What would it cost you to follow Jesus if you lived somewhere else in the world?

-For most of us, **following Jesus** is something we can do **openly**.

-We can **attend church**, **own a Bible**, **pray publicly**, and **share** our **faith** with others.

-We may **experience criticism** or **disagreement** because of our beliefs,

-But very few of us have ever worried about being **arrested**, **imprisoned**, or **killed** simply because we're **Christians**.

-But that **ISN'T** the reality for every **believer** around the **world**.

-There are places today where following Jesus comes with an **extraordinary cost**.

2. WWW.OPENDOORS.ORG

-1 in 7 Christians are persecuted worldwide

-1 in 5 Christians are persecuted in Africa

-2 in 5 Christians are persecuted in Asia

A. 4,849 Christians Killed in 2026

-The total number of **Christians killed** for their faith increased from **4,476** in **2025** to **4,849** in **2026**.

-The **vast majority** of this being from **sub-Saharan Africa**.

-Out of the total of **4,849** deaths, **4,491** took place in the SSA region;

-a shocking **93%** of the global total.

-**Nigerian** Christians make up **3,490** of this total, up from **3,100** last year.

B. 224,129 Forced from Home In 2026

-More **Christians** were **forced** to leave their **homes**, go into **hiding** in-country or **leave** the country entirely, because of **violent persecution**.

-This number grew from **209,771** in last year's World Watch List.

C. Top 10

1. North Korea

- a. North Korea is arguably the **most dangerous place** on earth to follow Jesus. If someone is discovered to be a Christian, the consequences are **unimaginably severe**: Either

imprisonment in one of its notorious **labor camps**, with little hope of release, or **immediate execution**. The **same fate** is likely to await other **family members**.

2. **Somalia,**

3. **Yemen,**

4. **Sudan,**

5. **Eretria,**

6. **Syria,**

7. **Nigeria,**

- a. On **Easter Sunday, April 5, 2026**, armed attackers struck churches in Kaduna State. The Nigerian military reported rescuing **31 abducted** civilians and finding **5 people dead**; a local Christian leader reported **7 deaths**. Worshipers had gathered for Easter when **violence interrupted** their services.

8. **Pakistan,**

9. **Libya,**

10. **Iran**

-The **persecuted church** is still very much a part of **Christianity today**.

-We often think about **persecution** as something that happened to the **early church**, particularly during the **Roman Empire**.

-But for **millions of believers**, persecution **ISN'T history**.

Violence in Numbers in 2026

- More than **388m Christians** suffer high levels of persecution and discrimination for their faith.
- **4,849** Christians murdered
- **4,712** Christians detained/Imprisoned
- **3,632** Churches and Christian properties attacked

-It's their **present reality**.

-And it raises an important **question**:

What happens to a person's faith when following Jesus begins to cost them something?

-Just this **past Sunday**, we looked at **Luke 9:23**, where Jesus said:

"Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross daily and follow me."

-We talked about the **cost of discipleship**.

-Following Jesus means **surrendering** our own **desires**, our **plans**, and ultimately our **lives** to Him.

-But imagine **hearing** those words in a place where **publicly identifying** with **Jesus** could **cost** you:

- your **freedom**.

- Or your **home**.
- Or even your **life**.

-For many of the **earliest** Christians, that wasn't a **hypothetical possibility**...

-It was their **reality**.

-And that's what I want us to **explore tonight**.

-As we've **studied** through the **first 4 verses** of James 1,

-We examined his **instruction** to the **persecuted** believers who were **scattered** among the nations.

-James tells them to **consider** their **trials** an occasion for **joy**

-Because the testing of their **faith produces perseverance**.

-So **tonight**, I want us to better **understand** the **historical world** of the **early church**.

-What did persecution look like?

-Why were believers scattered?

-And what happened to the church when its followers were forced to leave Jerusalem?

-To answer those **questions**, we're going to turn to the **book of Acts**.

-And we're going to begin with a man named **Stephen** who was **martyred** for his **faith** in Jesus.

3. THE COST OF FOLLOWING JESUS

-Before we read about Stephen's **death**, I want us to understand a little about **who** he was.

-The church in Jerusalem was **growing rapidly**.

-**Thousands** of people had placed their faith in Jesus Christ,

-and with that **growth** came some **challenges**.

-In Acts 6:1, we discover that a **complaint** arose because some of the **widows** were being **overlooked** in the daily **distribution of food**.

-The apostles **recognized** that this was a legitimate **concern**,

-So, they instructed the believers to **select seven men** who were known to be

-**full** of the **Spirit** and **wisdom** to **oversee** this responsibility.

Acts 6:5 They chose Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit...

-Now, here's what I find **interesting**.

-Stephen **WASN'T** one of the **twelve apostles**.

-He wasn't **introduced** as a **pastor** or a prominent **leader** in the church.

-He was a man who had been **selected** to help meet a **practical need** among the believers.

-But notice how Scripture **describes** him.

-He was **full of faith** and **of the Holy Spirit**.

Acts 6:8 And Stephen, full of faith and power, did great wonders and signs among the people.

-Stephen was performing **great wonders** and **signs** among the people.

-So, Stephen **WASN'T** someone who just **volunteered** to help **distribute food**.

-His **life** demonstrated the **presence** and **power** of the Holy Spirit.

-And his ministry began **attracting opposition**.

A. Stephen Faces Opposition: Acts 6:9–15

-Acts 6 tells us that certain members of a **synagogue** began **arguing** with Stephen.

Acts 6:10 But they could not stand up against the wisdom the Spirit gave him as he spoke.

-Stephen was **full** of the **Holy Spirit**, and he was still **experiencing opposition**.

-Sometimes we develop the **mistaken idea** that if we're **following** Jesus **faithfully**, everything should **go smoothly**.

-But that **WASN'T** Stephen's experience.

-His faithfulness **DIDN'T** eliminate **opposition**.

-In fact, his **testimony contributed** to the opposition he experienced.

-Eventually, **false accusations** were brought against Stephen,

-and he was taken before the **Sanhedrin**, the Jewish **ruling council**.

¹¹ Then they secretly induced men to say, "We have heard him speak blasphemous words against Moses and God." ¹² And they stirred up the people, the elders, and the scribes; and they came upon him, seized him, and brought him to the council. ¹³ They also set up false witnesses who said, "This man does not cease to speak blasphemous words against this holy place and the law; ¹⁴ for we have heard him say that this Jesus of Nazareth will destroy this place and change the customs which Moses delivered to us." ¹⁵ And all who sat in the council, looking steadfastly at him, saw his face as the face of an angel.

-Here's an interesting perspective...**persecution** can come in the form of **false accusations**.

-In his **rebuttal** in Acts 7, Stephen delivers a **lengthy defense**.

-He walks through **Israel's history**, beginning with **Abraham**, continuing through **Joseph** and **Moses**,

-and ultimately **confronting** the **religious leaders** with their **resistance** to **God's work**.

-Let's read Acts 7:54–60 together.

B. Stephen's Death: Acts 7:54–60

Acts 7:54–60 ⁵⁴ *When the members of the Sanhedrin heard this, they were furious and gnashed their teeth at him.* ⁵⁵ *But Stephen, full of the Holy Spirit, looked up to heaven and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God.* ⁵⁶ *"Look," he said, "I see heaven open and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God."* ⁵⁷ *At this they covered their ears and, yelling at the top of their voices, they all rushed at him,* ⁵⁸ *dragged him out of the city and began to stone him. Meanwhile, the witnesses laid their coats at the feet of a young man named Saul.* ⁵⁹ *While they were stoning him, Stephen prayed, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit."* ⁶⁰ *Then he fell on his knees and cried out, "Lord, do not hold this sin against them." When he had said this, he fell asleep.*

-There are a **few ideas** I want us to notice in this **passage**.

-First, notice the reaction of the religious leaders.

-When they **heard** Stephen's **words**, they were **furious** and **gnashed** their **teeth** at him.

-This wasn't simply a **disagreement** about **theology**.

-Their anger was **intense**, and it was about to **turn violent**.

-But now look at **verse 55**.

"But Stephen, full of the Holy Spirit, looked up to heaven..."

-Think about the **contrast**.

-The **people** around Stephen were **filled with anger**.

-But **Stephen** was **filled** with the **Holy Spirit**.

-And he **looked** toward **heaven** and saw the **glory of God**

-and **Jesus standing** at the **right hand** of God.

-Now, **DON'T** miss the **significance** of what Luke is describing.

-Stephen was **facing** an incredibly **frightening** situation.

-He was **surrounded** by people who wanted to **kill him**.

-And yet, in the **middle** of that **moment**, Scripture **emphasizes** that he was **full of the Holy Spirit**.

-Being **filled** with the **Spirit DIDN'T** mean Stephen would **escape suffering**.

-But the **Spirit** was **present** with him during it.

-The **presence** of the **Holy Spirit DOESN'T** guarantee the **absence** of **suffering**.

-But I **believe** the **Holy Spirit empowers** believers to remain **faithful** even when suffering **comes**.

-Is God's presence with all of those around the world experiencing persecution?

C. Stephen Remains Faithful to the End: Acts 7:57–58.

- The crowd **covered** their **ears** and began **shouting**,
- Rushed** at Stephen and **dragged** him outside the city.
- And there they began to **stone** him.
- Stephen was being **killed** because of his **testimony** concerning **Jesus**.
- But **notice** his **final words**.
- In verse 59, Stephen prays: "**Lord Jesus, receive my spirit.**"
- And then in verse 60: "**Lord, do not hold this sin against them.**"

Does that sound familiar?

- He's **praying** the **same words** **JESUS** spoke in His moment of death on the **cross**.
- Stephen is **recognized** as the **first Christian martyr**.
- But here's what I **want** you to **understand**.
- Stephen's **death WASN'T** the **result** of a **lack of faith**.
- He **WASN'T** suffering because he had **failed** to **follow** Jesus.
- It was because he was **faithfully proclaiming Jesus**.
- That's an **important truth** for us to **recognize** when we talk about the **persecuted church**.
- Sometimes **suffering** comes because someone has **chosen** to **follow Christ**.

D. A Young Man Named Saul: Acts 7:58

- Now, before we **move on**, I want you to **notice** one **detail** in verse 58.
- It becomes **incredibly important** to the **rest** of the **book of Acts**.

Luke 7:58 Meanwhile, the witnesses laid their coats at the feet of a young man named Saul.

- This is the **first time** we're **introduced** to **Saul** in the book of Acts.
- He's present at the **execution** of **Stephen**.
- Now, Scripture **DOESN'T** tell us that **Saul** personally **threw stones**.
- But it does tell us something about his **attitude toward** what was **happening**.
- Look at the beginning of **Acts 8:1 And Saul approved of their killing him**.
- Saul **WASN'T** an **innocent bystander**.
- He **approved** of **Stephen's death**.
- And this was the **beginning** of his **involvement** in **persecuting** Christians.
- At this point in the story, **Stephen** is **dead**.

-The **church** has **lost** a faithful **servant**.

-And a young man named **Saul** is standing there, **approving** of his **execution**.

- ***If you were a believer in Jerusalem, what would you be thinking?***
- ***Would you be afraid?***
- ***Would you wonder who might be next?***
- ***Would you begin questioning whether it was safe to gather with other Christians?***

-Because what **happens next** is going to **change the lives** of many **believers** in Jerusalem.

-Stephen's **death WASN'T** the **end** of the **persecution**.

-It was **followed** by the **beginning** of something **much larger**.

4. THE CHURCH IS SCATTERED: ACTS 8:1–4

-**Stephen** is dead **because** of his **testimony**.

-We've been **introduced** to a young man named **Saul**, who **approved** of Stephen's **execution**.

-And now a much **greater persecution** is **beginning**.

A. Persecution Breaks Out Against the Church

-Notice how verse 1 **begins**:

Acts 8:1 On that day a great persecution broke out against the church in Jerusalem...

-Luke wants us to understand the **connection** between **Stephen's death**

-and the **persecution** that **followed... "on that day"**

-What **happened** to Stephen was now **becoming a threat** to the larger **Christian community**.

-And the **words** Luke use are **great persecution**.

-This wasn't a **few people disagreeing** with what the **Christians believed**.

-Believers were **being targeted** because of their **association** with **Jesus**.

And what happened as a result?

-The remainder of verse 1 tells us...

Acts 8:1 On that day a great persecution broke out against the church in Jerusalem, and all except the apostles were scattered throughout Judea and Samaria.

-Now, **think about** what that would **mean**.

-**Jerusalem** was the **center** of the **early church**.

-It was where **Jesus' followers** had **gathered** following His **resurrection** and **ascension**.

-It was where the **Holy Spirit** had been **poured out** on the **Day of Pentecost**.

-And it was where **thousands** of **people** had **placed their faith** in Jesus Christ.

-In Acts 2:42–47, Luke describes a **beautiful picture** of the **early church**.

-They **devoted** themselves to the apostles' **teaching, fellowship, breaking bread, and prayer**.

-They **shared** with those who had **needs**.

-They **gathered** and enjoyed the **fellowship** of other **believers**.

-But now, that **community** was **experiencing persecution**.

-**Imagine** being one of those **believers**.

- You have a **family**.
- You have a **home**.
- You have **responsibilities**.
- You have **relationships** with people you've known for years.

-And because you've **placed your faith** in Jesus Christ...

-**Remaining** in Jerusalem may **no longer be safe**.

- ***Where would you go?***
- ***How would you provide for your family?***
- ***Would you ever be able to return?***
- ***Would the persecution follow you?***

-Luke **DOESN'T** give us the personal **stories** of **every believer** who was **scattered**.

-But these are the **questions** people **face** when persecution **forces** them to **leave** their homes.

-And I want us to **recognize** something.

-These weren't just **names** in a **history book**.

-These were **real people** whose **lives** were being **disrupted** because they **followed Jesus**.

-This is what **persecution** can **look like**.

-It's **NOT** always an **execution** like **Stephen's**.

- Sometimes it's the **loss of security**.
- Sometimes it's **being separated** from familiar surroundings.
- Sometimes it's having to **begin life again** somewhere else.

-And for these **early believers**, following Jesus had **become costly**.

-And we are **still seeing** this **today**!

-And you **may not know** the **stories** of **believers** in Eritrea or **Nigeria** or Pakistan...

-But **they are** still our **brothers** and **sisters** in Christ!

B. Saul Begins Destroying the Church

Acts 8:3 But Saul began to destroy the church. Going from house to house, he dragged off both men and women and put them in prison.

-Here we **encounter** Saul again.

-And this time, he's **NOT standing nearby** while someone **else carries out** the **persecution**.

-Saul is **actively participating**.

-**Luke** says he began to **destroy** the **church**.

-The Greek verb is **lymainō (loo-my-no)**, which carries the idea of **ravaging, mistreating, injury, devastating, or causing serious harm**.

-This is **strong language**.

-Saul **WASN'T** trying to have a **friendly theological discussion** with the **followers** of Jesus.

-He was **attempting to suppress** the church.

-And **notice how** he was doing it.

-He was going from **house to house**.

-In the **early church**, believers frequently **gathered** in **homes**.

-Now Saul was **entering homes, dragging out** men and women, and having them **imprisoned**.

-This **WASN'T** persecution **taking place** somewhere **far away**, like **Iran**.

-It was **reaching** the places where **people lived**.

- Their **homes**.
- Their **neighbors**
- Their **families**.
- Their everyday **lives**.

-And **notice** that Luke specifically mentions **both men and women**.

-Saul **WASN'T limiting** his persecution to the **apostles** or other **prominent leaders**.

-**Ordinary** believers were being **arrested**.

- ***If you knew someone was going from house to house arresting Christians, how would that affect your willingness to identify publicly with Jesus?***
- ***Would you still gather with other believers?***
- ***Would you still tell people about Jesus?***
- ***Would you begin to question whether following Him was worth the cost?***

-Those are **difficult** questions.

- But they help us **appreciate** the **reality** these believers were **facing**.
- And I think they also help us **better understand** the words of Jesus in **Luke 9:23**.
- Jesus calls us to **deny** ourselves, **take up** our cross daily, and **follow** Him.
- And now, in Acts 8, we're **seeing** what that **commitment** could **mean**.

C. The Scattered Believers Continue Proclaiming Jesus

Acts 8:4 Those who had been scattered preached the word wherever they went.

- I think this may be the **most important verse** in tonight's **teaching**.

"Those who had been scattered preached the word wherever they went."

- I want you to **think about** that statement for a **moment**.
- These **believers** had **experienced persecution**.
- Many had been **forced** to **leave Jerusalem**.
- Their **lives** had been **disrupted**.
- And yet, wherever they went, they **continued proclaiming** the **gospel**.
- The **persecution scattered** the believers, but it **DIDN'T silence** their **witness**.
- Now, there's **something here** I **DON'T** want us to **overlook**.

Acts 8:1 On that day a great persecution broke out against the church in Jerusalem, and all except the apostles were scattered throughout Judea and Samaria.

- Luke tells us that the **believers** were **scattered** throughout Judea and Samaria, **except the apostles**.
- The **apostles remained** in Jerusalem.
- So, when **verse 4** says those who were **scattered preached** the word wherever they **went**...

Who was doing the proclaiming?

- It was **ordinary believers**.

- People who had **come to faith** in Jesus.
- People whose **lives** had been **changed** by the **gospel**.
- People who now **found themselves living** in **unfamiliar** places.
- And **wherever** they went, they **continued telling** others about **Jesus**.

- The word **translated preached DOESN'T** necessarily **mean** these believers were **standing behind pulpits** delivering formal **sermons**.

The Greek verb used here is ***euangelizō*** (*yoo-ang-ghe-leed'-zo*),

- Meaning to **announce** or **proclaim good news**.

- The prefix "**eu**" simply means **good**.
- And the **suffix** come from the Greek "**angelos**"...
- Which means **Angel** or **Messenger**.
- When the **Greeks** were **engaged** in a **battle**, a **runner** or herald would **sprint** back to the **city**
- And hopefully **deliver** the **euangelizō** that they had **won** the **battle**
- These **persecuted believers** were sharing the **good news** of **Jesus Christ**.
- And I think that's **important** for us as the **church** to **understand**.
- The **responsibility** of **sharing** the **gospel DOESN'T** belong exclusively to **pastors, missionaries, or church leaders**.
- Every** believer has the **opportunity** to **share** the **good news** of Jesus Christ.
- And that's **exactly** what we **see happening here**.
- The **apostles remained** in Jerusalem...
- But the **gospel continued** spreading because **ordinary believers**
- Carried** the **message** wherever they went.

What does this passage teach us about the responsibility of ordinary believers to share Jesus, regardless of where life takes them?

5. SAUL'S PERSECUTION CONTINUES

- We've seen the **persecution** of the **church** in **Jerusalem**.
- We've seen **believers scattered** throughout **Judea** and **Samaria**.
- And we've **discovered** that wherever these **believers went**,
- They continued **proclaiming** the **gospel**.

But what happened to Saul?

Acts 9:1–2 Meanwhile, Saul was still breathing out murderous threats against the Lord's disciples. He went to the high priest ² and asked him for letters to the synagogues in Damascus, so that if he found any there who belonged to the Way, whether men or women, he might take them as prisoners to Jerusalem.

- I want you to **notice** the word **still**.
- Saul **HADN'T changed** his **mind** about the followers of Jesus.
- In fact, his **efforts** to **stop** the church were **continuing**.
- And now he was **taking** his **persecution** beyond **Jerusalem**.

- Saul went to the **high priest** and **requested letters** to the **synagogues** in **Damascus**.
- His intention was to **find followers** of Jesus, **arrest** them, and **bring them back** to Jerusalem.
- Damascus was approximately **135 miles northeast of Jerusalem**.
- Saul was **willing to travel** that **distance...**
- Only** because he was **determined** to **stop** the **spread** of Christianity.
- And **notice** something else in verse 2.
- Luke describes **the believers** as those who **belonged** to "**the Way**."
- That's one of the **earliest descriptions** of **followers** of Jesus in the book of Acts.
- The **Greek** expression is *hodos*, literally, "**of the Way**" or a "**road to travel**".
- The **Greeks** used this word to describe a **physical road** connecting **cities** and **communities**.
- But also a "**journey**" a **traveler** was on.
- Luke **DOESN'T** explain precisely why this **designation originated**,
- but it **certainly fits** the **identity** of those who **followed Jesus**.
- Remember what Jesus said in *John 14:6*, "**I am the way and the truth and the life**."
- Christianity **WASN'T** merely something these **believers believed**.
- It was **the way** they had **chosen to live**.

And that **commitment** was now **placing** them in **danger**.

- But I want to **consider something** else about **Saul**.
- Saul **believed** he was **doing** the **right thing**.
- He **WASN'T** **persecuting** Christians because he had **NO religious convictions**.
- Quite** the **opposite...** he was **deeply committed** to his **understanding** of **Judaism**.
- Later, in **Philippians 3:4–6**, Paul describes his **former life**, including his **zeal** in **persecuting** the **church**.

Acts 26:9 "*I too was convinced that I ought to do all that was possible to oppose the name of Jesus of Nazareth.*"

- Saul was **sincere**, but he was **sincerely wrong**.
- Sincerity **alone DOESN'T** determine whether **something is true**.
- We can be **passionate** about **something**.
- We can be **deeply convinced** that we're **right**.
- But our **convictions** must still be **submitted** to the truth of **God's Word** and **Jesus Christ**.

6. SCATTERED, BUT NOT SILENCED

-I want to **finish up tonight** with one more passage of Scripture...

-I want us to **see** what was **happening** to the **church** while **Saul** was trying to **stop** it.

Acts 11:19–21 ¹⁹ ***Now those who had been scattered by the persecution that broke out when Stephen was killed traveled as far as Phoenicia, Cyprus and Antioch, spreading the word only among Jews.*** ²⁰ ***Some of them, however, men from Cyprus and Cyrene, went to Antioch and began to speak to Greeks also, telling them the good news about the Lord Jesus.*** ²¹ ***The Lord's hand was with them, and a great number of people believed and turned to the Lord.***

-Dr. Luke is taking us back to Acts 7 and 8.

- Back to **Stephen's death**.
- Back to the **persecution** in **Jerusalem**.
- Back to the **believers** who were **forced** to **leave** their **homes**.

-But now Luke tells us something **more** about where those **believers** went.

-They traveled as far as **Phoenicia, Cyprus, and Antioch**.

-Let's **think** about those **locations** for a moment.

-**Phoenicia** was a **coastal region north** of Israel.

-**Cyprus** was an **island** in the **Mediterranean Sea**.

-And **Antioch** was a major city in **Syria**, well north of Jerusalem.

-These **WEREN'T** neighboring villages.

-The **gospel** was **traveling across** considerable **distances**.

-And **remember** who was **carrying** it.

-**Believers** who had been **scattered** because of **persecution**.

A. The Gospel Was Moving Beyond Jerusalem

-Now in Acts 1:8, Jesus told His disciples:

"But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth."

-We've **seen** the **gospel move** into **Judea** and **Samaria** in Acts 8.

-And now, in **Acts 11**, we're seeing it **reach additional regions**.

-The **Good News** of Jesus was **spreading geographically**.

-But I want you to **notice** something else.

-Verse 19 says these **believers** were **initially sharing** the message **only among Jews**.

- The **earliest Christians** were **Jewish believers** who recognized **Jesus** as the promised **Messiah**.
- And **naturally**, many of them **began sharing** that message with other **Jewish people**.
- But in verse 20, we see them **sharing** it with the **Greeks**!
- Here we're **seeing** another **significant development**.
- The **gospel** was moving into **new locations**.
- And it was **reaching NEW** groups of **people**.
- And verse 21 tells us... **"the Lord's hand was with them."**

B. Persecution Didn't Silence the Church

- Now, let's **bring** the **story together**.
- The **story** of the **scattered tribes** that we read about in **James 1**.

What were the opponents of Christianity trying to accomplish?

- They wanted to **stop** the movement.
- Stephen had been **killed**.
- Believers had been **arrested**.
- Others had been **scattered**.
- And Saul was actively **pursuing** Christians beyond Jerusalem.

But what was happening?

- The gospel was **spreading**.
 - People were **hearing** about Jesus.
 - And new believers were **coming** to faith.
- The **persecution SCATTERED** the church, but it **DIDN'T SILENCE** the **gospel**.
 - Now, I want to be **careful** here for a moment.
 - I **DON'T** want it to **appear** that we are **minimizing** the **suffering** these believers **experienced**.
 - **Stephen** really died.
 - **Families** really experienced disruption.
 - **Men and Women** really were imprisoned.
 - And some **believers** were forced to leave familiar places.
 - Their **suffering WASN'T** imaginary...
 - But the **remarkable thought** is that their **circumstances DIDN'T** bring an end...
 - To the **mission of Jesus**.
 - The **gospel continued spreading**.

-And God **still uses** situations like these all **over the world!**

- **Iran** has one of the fastest-growing **underground evangelical church movements** in the world, despite being one of the most severe environments for Christian persecution. <https://voice.dts.edu/article/persecution-the-new-normal-doyle-tom/>
- Over the last several decades, **China** has seen an unprecedented **explosion of Christianity** that **thrived** entirely **under pressure**. <https://persecution.org/2025/07/03/faith-under-fire-is-persecution-necessary-for-the-growth-of-christianity/>
- **Nigeria** is one of the **deadliest countries** in the world for Christians, yet it is simultaneously seeing a **massive, resilient spiritual revival**. <https://globalchristianrelief.org/stories/examples-of-persecution-today/>
- The underground Christian church in **North Korea** continues to **survive**. Believers secretly **pass** down **scripture** and meet in **hidden places** to worship Jesus Christ. <https://globalchristianrelief.org/stories/examples-of-persecution-today/>

C. The Mission Was Bigger Than Jerusalem

-The early church had **experienced extraordinary** things in **Jerusalem**.

- The Day of Pentecost.
- Thousands coming to faith.
- Miracles.
- Teaching.
- Fellowship.
- A growing community of believers.

-But the **mission** Jesus had **given** His followers was never **intended to remain** confined to **Jerusalem**

-Jesus had **called them** to be His **witnesses** to the **ends of the earth**.

-And as **believers traveled** into new **communities**, they carried that **mission** with them.

-The church **WASN'T** defined simply by **WHERE believers gathered**.

-It was **defined** by the **One** they **followed** and the **message** they **shared**.

-We often associate the **church** with a **building**, or a **location**.

-Those things **matter**...but the church is more than a **building**.

-The **Greek** word for **church** is **ekklesia**...and of the **118** times it's used in the NT.

-It **NEVER** refers to a **building**...or **location**

-It comes from two Greek words... **ek** and **kaleō**

-Which means a **gathering** of people "**called out**"...

-God **DOESN'T** need **persecution** to **scatter** believers...but God **uses** it!

- And because of the **people** who were **scattered** out of **Jerusalem**...
- The one **James** refers to in **James 1:1**...
- Is the **reason** we are **here** today...we are **part** of the **mission** of Jesus.
- That even through **persecution** of the **past** and **present**...
- Believers** continue to **proclaim** Jesus.
- And the **Lord worked** and is **still working** through their **witness**.
- And we can see when the **church** was **experiences opposition**, the **gospel** still **advances**.
- The **church** may still be **Scattered**...but it is not **Silenced**!